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Mrs Nina Panayis
The Acting Headteacher
St James' CofE Junior School
Tower Hamlets Road
Forest Gate
London
E7 9DA

Dear Mrs Panayis

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST JAMES' CofE JUNIOR SCHOOL

Following my visit to your school on 11 and 12 December 2007, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in February 2007. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed subject to contact with HMI.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Diocese of Chelmsford and the Director for Children and Young People's Services for Newham.

Yours sincerely

Kekshan Salaria
Her Majesty's Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF ST JAMES' CofE JUNIOR SCHOOL

Report from the second monitoring inspection: 11 and 12 December 2007

Evidence

During the visit seven lessons or parts of lessons were observed. Pupils were observed around the school. Discussions were held with the acting headteacher, a range of middle and senior managers, pupils from the school council, the chair of governors, and the school improvement partner. A range of school documents was scrutinised.

Context

There have been substantial staff changes at the school since the last monitoring inspection. The previous acting headteacher, in post at the time of the last visit, left at the end of the summer term as planned. He was replaced in September 2007 by another acting headteacher who will remain at the school until the end of the academic year. The acting deputy headteacher and two assistant headteachers also joined the school in September and will remain for the year. Additionally, three class teachers also left the school at the end of the term and were replaced with agency staff. A further three teachers will be leaving the school at the end of this term. The local authority (LA) is currently exploring the possibility of developing federation arrangements with other schools.

Achievement and standards

Inspection evidence indicates that most pupils' progress in lessons is now satisfactory and some pupils are making good progress. They are beginning to catch up lost ground. However, standards and achievement over time remain inadequate. The rate of progress pupils make is inconsistent between classes, reflecting some inadequacies in teaching. The school has plans to use specific intervention programmes to target these pupils. The school's data show that pupils with learning difficulties who receive specific intervention programmes are generally making better progress than previously. However, the school has yet to analyse its data to evaluate the progress of different groups of pupils, including those who speak English as an additional language. The quality of pupils' work in books is improving. The school's focus on handwriting and presentation, albeit fairly recent, is helping to set higher expectations.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in February 2007:

- Raise standards and improve pupils' achievements in English, mathematics and science – satisfactory.
- Increase opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills in other subject areas – not inspected on this visit.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' behaviour in lessons is generally good particularly when teaching is at least satisfactory and sharply focused to their needs. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning although their enthusiasm and motivation diminish when lessons are over directed by teachers. Movement generally around the school is orderly, and pupils are polite and friendly. Pupils recognise the school's increased focus on learning and talk readily about improvements in the school, for example, in behaviour and greater stability in staffing.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is satisfactory and continues to improve. Most emphasis has been put, rightly, on raising the quality of teaching in English and mathematics and it is here that the most improvement can be seen. Elements of teaching are improving as a result of the acting headteacher's focus. An example is planning which is now satisfactory and using a consistent format. Learning objectives are sharper and are written so pupils can easily understand them. Planning for the different learning needs of pupils is improving, although there is a way to go to ensure that tasks consistently match pupils' abilities. Further improvements in practice are seen in the way teachers are beginning to evaluate their lessons. The best teaching is lively, engaging and has high expectations of work and behaviour. Tasks are practical and collaborative work helps pupils to link challenging concepts. Work in these lessons is focused carefully on the pupils' individual learning needs and is well directed and managed.

Lessons now have a clear focus on key vocabulary which pupils are encouraged to use correctly. Some good strategies for engaging pupils in their learning, such as paired talk, are used more frequently although too many lessons still rely on a 'question and answer' approach that focuses on individuals and restricts the participation of the majority. Occasionally, the introduction to a lesson is too long and restricts the time that pupils have to complete their written work. The quality of the learning environment has significantly improved. All classrooms contain aids to learning, key words and some high quality pupils' work.

In the less effective lessons, objectives are highlighted at the start of the lesson but they often describe tasks to be completed, rather than the learning that will take place. In some of the lesson observed, progress is slow because teachers fail to ask questions that encourage pupils to think and explain their thinking. Pupils' workbooks indicate that in some classes there is an over-reliance on worksheets rather than on practical or investigative activities. The quality of marking is varied. While some is regular, helpful and encouraging, other marking does not provide pupils with sufficient guidance on how to improve and is not used well enough to inform future planning.

Appropriate plans are in place to tackle the lack of support and planning for pupils who speak English as an additional language. At present, support is patchy and not

organised systematically. Training from the LA consultant has raised staff's awareness of strategies to support pupils in class but lesson planning is not specific for these pupils.

Data management is good. Significant steps have been taken to put in place a data tracking system so that pupils' progress can be measured more accurately. This highlights for senior staff those pupils who are not making sufficient progress so that support can be targeted. There is a clear acknowledgement that satisfactory teaching is not good enough to close the gap between current standards and what they should be.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in February 2007:

- Improve the consistency and demand of teaching and learning throughout the school – satisfactory.
- Track the progress of pupils more closely and set more challenging targets – good.

Leadership and management

The new acting headteacher is providing good leadership. She has built effectively on the work of the previous acting headteacher. The school runs smoothly and efficiently, policies and procedures are being developed systematically and routines are well established. The headteacher commands the respect of the staff and the pupils. She is continuing to foster the development of the staff team and has suitably high expectations of them. Staff, governors and the LA have confidence in her ability to make the required changes. The pace of improvement has speeded up, although evaluation by senior leaders recognises that there is still a great deal to be done. Satisfactory progress has been made in building the capacity of middle managers but both the acting headteacher and deputy carry a relatively heavy operational workload. The school's improvement plan has been extended and identifies the right issues with appropriate steps to address them. The monitoring of lessons is satisfactory; it provides a secure baseline for improvement by identifying aspects of strength and areas for development. Common areas for improvement are tackled through staff training. The positive impact on staff practice is beginning to show but it is too early for this to have an impact on standards. Judgements on the quality of teaching are accurate. However, although observations focus on the characteristics of teaching they fall short of identifying their impact on pupils' learning and progress.

The inconsistent quality of provision and support for pupils with learning difficulties, raised at the last monitoring inspection has improved significantly. The quality of provision in class is monitored closely. The school is implementing appropriate interventions to support pupils with learning difficulties and has appropriate plans to recruit and train staff to run these.

The governors are led by a recently appointed chair and are developing into an effective group. They now have a strategic overview and also a clear focus on what needs to be done. They are beginning to establish themselves so that they are less reliant on LA support and are starting to ask the right questions of the school's leadership team.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in February 2007:

- Ensure that all those with leadership and management roles can properly account for the standards of pupils' work and the quality of educational provision within their areas of responsibility – satisfactory.

External support

The LA is now providing good support at both a strategic and an operational level. Good quality input from LA consultants is starting to have the desired impact on improving key aspects of the school's provision. Support is regular, well targeted and focused. More importantly, it is responsive to the school's changing needs. Regular meetings provide a helpful review of the school's progress and identify emerging issues.